

Towards exploring Lossky's philosophical personalism

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Abstract

A faithful proponent of the tradition of the 'Silver Age' of Russian philosophical tradition that elevates holistic knowledge, Nikolai Lossky became known worldwide for his unique emphasis on personality development. This article explores the concrete tenets of Lossky's philosophical personalism as 'spiritual personalism' in which science, philosophy, and religion are craftily integrated into one complex vision of human personhood. The roots of Lossky's philosophical personalism in the spiritual and ethical evolution of humankind, society, and nature are explored, along with their pastoral/therapeutic implications for our present society.

Key words: Nikolai Lossky, philosophical personalism, human personhood, spiritual personalism

1 Introduction

Nikolai Onufriyevich Lossky [Николай Онуфриевич Лосский] (1870-1965), a famous and inspiring 20th-century Russian philosopher, continues to captivate intellectual minds and bold imaginations of thinkers far beyond his homeland. He is known, above all, as a proponent of Russian Idealism, Intuitivism, and Personalism, but many count him among modern representatives of Libertarianism as well. His ideas contributed to the development of ethics and axiology, as well as both philosophical and religious/mystical anthropology. Lossky was a well-educated and well-traveled man with rich international experience. Born in Kraslava, Latvia, he spent most of his life in St. Petersburg, though his career engagements made him spend extended periods of time in Germany (where he did his graduate and postgraduate studies), the Czech Republic, the United States (New York) and finally in Paris, France. His dissertation analyzed the then-existing psychological theories from the perspective of voluntarism. He submitted and defended it under the title: "Die Grundlagen der Psychologie vom Standpunkte des Voluntarismus" (Lossky, 1904a). In addition to numerous modern thinkers who have since his death continued to spread and develop his legacy, his contribution to our intellectual milieu's richness was embodied in his son, also a famous philosopher/theologian, Vladimir Nikolaevich Lossky (1903-1958).

Nikolai Lossky's mind received ecumenical impulses from very early on in his life due to his parents' religious intermarriage. His father, Onufry Lossky, was a Russian Orthodox Christian, while his mother, Adelajda Przylenicka (originally from Poland), was a devout Roman Catholic. His open mind earned him the derogatory label of being an 'atheist' – according to his grammar school teachers. His German education, namely his doctorate from philosophy, predisposed him to a university career. He started as an assistant at the University in St. Petersburg in his homeland. The philosophically and atheistically inclined young thinker experienced an inner conversion following an elevator incident that almost killed him. His return to the church accompanied with an intense interest in theology and mysticism was facilitated with the help of Pavel Alexandrovich Florenskij [Павел Александрович Флоренский] (1882-1937). While marking an important new stage in Lossky's spiritual development, his 'theological turn' resulted in his release from the university and ultimately in a forced exile in 1922.

The bitter experience of being ousted from the university and finally exiled from his homeland did not detract from Lossky's patriotism. He always remained fond of the Russian culture and convinced of his country's unquestionable contribution to the global culture and the development of sciences. These ideas resonate in his famous work *History of Russian Philosophy*, where he writes:

The Russian culture of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century has a worldwide significance. Such significance may be said to attach to a nation's culture when the values developed in it hold for humanity as a whole. Such was the culture of ancient Greece and Rome, and, in modern times, of England, France, Germany, America; Russian culture in the form it had before the Bolshevik revolution undoubtedly also has a universal significance. To see the truth of this it is sufficient to recall the names of Pushkin, Gogol, Turgenev, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, or of Glinka, Tchaikovsky, Mussorgsky, Rimsky Korsakov, or the achievements of Russian theatrical art in the drama, the opera, the ballet. In the realm of science it is enough to mention the names of Lobachevsky, Mendeleev and Mechnikov. The beauty, wealth, and subtlety of the Russian language give it an incontestable right to be considered one of the world languages. (Lossky, 1952: 9)

More importantly, at least from the perspective of our research topic, Lossky's conviction of the intimate interconnectedness of language, philosophy of law, ethical values, and the depth/intensity of the Russian people's religious experience. In Lossky's view, Russian Orthodoxy "contains values of an exceptionally high order of excellence," as these can be clearly detected (among other places) "in the aesthetic aspect of the Russian-Orthodox worship." While the interconnectedness between religious experience, the sciences, arts, and political culture may be elusive to some, it becomes obvious to those "capable of religious experience." (Lossky, 1952: 9-10)

This article explores the concrete tenets of Lossky's philosophical personalism as 'spiritual personalism' in which science, philosophy, and religion are craftily integrated into one complex vision of human personhood. We explore the roots of Lossky's philosophical personalism in the spiritual and ethical evolution of humankind, society, and nature, along with their pastoral/therapeutic implications for our present society. We argue that Western philosophers' tendency to misunderstand or depreciate Lossky's intuitive approach to knowledge owes much to a general lack of understanding of the larger Russian culture and philosophical/religious legacy. We work directly with numerous works written by Lossky as well as secondary authors who critically reflect and/or expand his intellectual legacy.

2 Lossky's Epistemology

Lossky's epistemological emphases shifted after his religious experience and turn to Russian Orthodoxy. He abandoned his skeptical and agnostic starting points and turned to the Church Fathers, especially those representing the Eastern Patristic heritage, for guidance. Among these, St. Origen and the Christian Neoplatonic tradition were most influential. In addition, the famous Russian mystics Aleksey Stepanovich Khomyakov (1804-1860) and Ivan Vasilyevich Kireevsky (1806-1856) inspired his thinking in the later stages of his life. Last but not least, Vladimir Sergeyevich Solovyov (1853-1900) made an indelible impact on Nikolai Onufriyevich, though his exposure to Solovyov was only reflected in his later works. Notwithstanding Lossky's personal religious experience and his theological/mystical 'turn,' the Russian intellectual remained more of a philosopher (though with profound mystical inclinations) than a church theologian. In Lossky's own words, he was "less concerned with theology than with the task of working out a system of metaphysics necessary for a Christian interpretation of the world." (Lossky, 1952: 206) This self-

imposed task at a “Christian interpretation of the world” thus became his primary objective. Lossky built his neo-idealist system on Christian Neoplatonic gnosological and epistemological presuppositions, incorporating a modified version of the Hegelian dialectical approach. The result was a peculiar, remarkable approach called ‘Intuitivist Personalism.’ Hegel’s dichotomic dialectics finds its new expression in what Lossky called ‘sobornost,’ or the mystical communal union.

Human consciousness, comprehension, understanding, perception, noesis, memory, intuition, instinct, experience, and insight are the essential terms used in Lossky’s epistemological reflections. (Lossky, 1906; 1913a; 1913b) Direct experience, instinct and intuition are the primary tools in a human subject’s perception of an object. Human consciousness develops an understanding of a given object based on the process that stems from instinctive and intuitive apprehension of the object in a direct experience. Each object is addressed, so to speak, ‘immediately’ by the comprehending mind. According to Lossky, “the object we intuit is not a copy but is the real original object. The connection between subject and object is achieved by what he calls an ‘epistemological coordination’ which is supertemporal and superspatial.” (Shein, 1966: 215) The whole of existence provides a unifying context for the process of understanding to take place and develop. The subject’s comprehension of the external object connects human consciousness with that which is perceived. The memory of this event then becomes the foundation of all subsequent processes of consciousness. In summary, Lossky is convinced of the possibility of direct, intuitive knowledge of outside phenomena – a process that occurs without employing one’s logic or rational thinking. (Lossky, 1914: 22-23) This first, intuitive experience thus deals with ‘raw reality’ by participating in it and absorbing first ‘imprints’ on the mind before they can be structured, ordered, and interpreted. The *nous* as the principal rational element of the human mind, then reflects rationally and logically on these experiential imprints. The organized experience that follows constitutes a cohesive ontology of one’s individual being, which, however, is never detached from the being of the world. There is no strict dichotomy between object and subject, mind and matter, though they are distinguished. (Lossky, 1904b; 1919)

Lossky set out to overcome the chasm between being (things as they are) and the self-conscious existence of knowing. This gap is typically emphasized in Western philosophical thinking. The process of knowing necessarily encompasses being; therefore, being is not external or transcendental to the process of knowing. This then enables an immediate insight, the insight of intuition, of all knowable objects in their essential (original) being. The epistemic presupposition here is that of a ‘monistic noetics.’ The knowing subject in the thusly conceived framework is an organic, dynamic, creative being. The subjective and objective aspects of knowing are intricately interlinked in one all-encompassing process. (Lossky, 1930: 254-256) It is important to note that Lossky’s ‘ideal-realism’ offers a view in which “both the realm of ideal beings and the realm of real beings are mind-independent.” As Tremblay (2016: 149) rightly observes when analyzing Lossky’s epistemological theses, “real beings are intuited by sensual intuition and ideal beings by intellectual intuition. The realm of ideal beings includes the subrealm of values, which is intuited by axiological intuition.”

To a large degree, then, Lossky can argue that consciousness functions intuitively rather than rationally. Within the human psyche, it is the *nous* that operates as the ground of intuitive conscious knowing. As objects in the outer environment can be addressed immediately through a kind of intuitive participation, an “organic connection” exists between the knowing subject and his environment (the objects that are being ‘known’). There is much freedom and randomness interwoven in the complex reality of our world, according to Lossky. The best representations of this spontaneous freedom can be found in the movement of love. Due to this fundamental

'irrationality' and 'randomness' of the world, intuitive knowing takes precedence over strictly rational knowing. Such intuitive knowing further facilitates the 'organic connection' between the knowing subject and world objects. Reflective differentiation constitutes the essence of the process of learning, whereby the knowing subject reinterprets the events from his memory as a dynamic, lived experience. (Lossky, 1906)

Lossky owes some of his ideas concerning human conscious experience's connection with memory to his friend and co-worker, Semen L. Fank (1877-1950), a Jewish Russian philosopher who had also converted to Christianity in his early 40s. (Molchanov, 2010) Together with Frank, Lossky devoted his attention to the process of knowledge abstraction. In order to arrive at what might be called 'epistemological knowledge,' it first needs to be experienced intuitively in real-life events and then consciously abstracted and stored in the mind. Epistemology thus becomes the result of this conscious processing of memory in the act of knowing. In this process, the human subject as a person transcends the reality of space and time while always staying connected with the world in its entirety. (Lossky, 1913a)

Lossky's emphasis on the constitutiveness of lived, conscious experience is crucial here. Not only does it serve to preserve the organic nature of the process of knowing, but it connects and integrates the subject into the process and the being of the world as a whole. Intuition can in some ways be considered synonymous with instinctual consciousness. The state of instinctual consciousness precludes the later state of rational, logical, reflective consciousness that takes place in the mind. In fact, instinctual consciousness facilitates the latter stage. Intuitive knowledge is not necessarily irrational or anti-rational, but it does occur without the direct use of logical thought. Instead of logical thought, direct processing of experience in the act of contemplation is underscored by Lossky. The nous, operating rationally with the help of logic, organizes the various segments of experiences stored in memory into comprehensible wholes. (Lossky, 1930: 258-259)

Revealingly, Lossky did not see a fundamental chasm between philosophy and theology, the endeavor of the human mind vs. the mystical participation in the divine. He rejected paganism and focused instead on showing how the complex process of cognition and knowing includes rational philosophy and logic, along with the irrational and intuitive. Human experience encompasses a mystical union of these elements whereby rational limits are transcended, and the human mind is directed to infinity by *theosis*. The bridge between the temporal and the transcendent can be located at the core of human beings' vitalism – the human soul. Having been influenced by the movement of Vitalism, Lossky believed that the vital spark of energy located in the human soul gives the human individual a living force that is constitutive for achieving *sobornost* (a complete organic whole). We will develop our analysis of this more thoroughly in the "Lossky's Personalism" section of this paper. What must be emphasized at this point, however, is Lossky's conviction that the faculty of human reason, *nous*, can only be used constructively as a tool of understanding if it is enlightened or redeemed. The integration of rational and intuitive understanding by the human mind only benefits the human agent if it is reconciled with what constitutes the core of his person – the soul. The transcendent/divine character of Lossky's mysticism manifests itself precisely on this point. As each human soul is the dwelling place of life's *dynamis* and *energeia*, it constitutes the bridge between immanence and transcendence. (Lossky, 1919)

Lossky's Epistemology Reflected by other Authors

A host of authors, both from the field of theology as well as philosophy, summarized and commented on Lossky's intuitive epistemology. Among them is Peter Mornar, who identifies Lossky's noetics as monistic, derived from the Russian philosopher's conviction that "all forms of valid knowledge are an immediate insight of objects in

their originals. Due to this character of the theory of knowledge it is possible to preserve the vital, dynamic nature of reality and to conceive of subject as vital, living and creative being.” (Mornar, 2003: 589) Mornar further observes that “Lossky tries to overcome the cleavage between knowledge and being, so characteristic for modern epistemology and science, by his doctrine of the noetic coordination of the subject and the object as the presupposition of the consciousness and knowing.” (Mornar, 2003: 589)

One of the most recognized scholars of Nikolai Lossky in contemporary academia is without a doubt Frederic Tremblay from Buffalo State University (USA). The world owes him several crucial translations of Lossky’s work as well as valuable studies that reveal the Russian author’s rich intellectual heritage. Despite the fact the Lossky actually skipped his classes with Husserl during his studies in Germany, Tremblay maintains that Lossky was “key to the history of the Husserl-Rezeption in Russia.” Tremblay substantiates his claim by pointing out that it was Lossky who first published “a review of the Russian translation of Husserl’s first volume of the *Logische Untersuchungen* that appeared in 1909,” adding to it his own “presentation and criticism of Husserl’s transcendental idealism in 1939.” In Tremblay’s view, Lossky “saw in the latter’s critique of psychologism support for his own ontology, epistemology, and axiology.” Lossky’s ambiguous reception of Husserl in the areas of noetics and epistemology can be documented by the Russian philosopher’s adoption of Husserl’s critique of psychologism (Schastlivceva, 2010) (to fight the ever-growing inclinations to subjectivism in philosophy) and the subsequent rejection of Husserl’s transcendental-idealist turn in phenomenology. (Tremblay, 2016: 149; Dmitriev, 1998: 181) Lossky’s profound criticism of Husserl’s transcendental idealism was published in 1939, titled: “Трансцендентально-феноменологический идеализм Гуссерля.” (Lossky, 1939) Tremblay’s analysis reveals that “Lossky interprets Husserl’s transcendental idealism as a Neo-Kantian idealism, and he criticizes it on the ground that it leads to a form of solipsism.” Even though Lossky recognizes that “Husserl is more radical than Descartes in his methodological doubt, he is not radical enough, because his abstention from existential judgment with regard to the external world is itself an existential judgment. In this regard, Lossky affirms that his own critically-informed defense of naive realism is in fact more radical than Husserl’s transcendental idealism.” (Lossky et al., 2016: 67)

Tremblay notices a similar ambiguousness in the reception of yet another significant Western philosopher by Lossky, Henri Bergson (1859-1941). Along with many of his academic contemporaries, Lossky could not ignore Bergson, for he found much inspiring material in the criticism of rationalism and inclination to immediate experience and intuition by the French philosopher. Owing to the close affinity of both authors on these crucial topics, it is not surprising that “Lossky is central to the study of the reception of Bergson in Russia.” To support his thesis, Tremblay (2017: 3) offers “the principal historical links, points of agreement between Bergson and Lossky, such as their respective anti-Kantianism, intuitivism, ontological realism, vitalism, organicism, Neo-Platonism, as well as their points of disagreement, including some of Lossky’s key criticisms of Bergson, with special emphasis on the issues of intuition, ideal being, substance and change, time, and sensible qualities.” (Tremblay, 2017: 3; See Lossky’s work: *The Defects of Bergson’s Epistemology and Their Consequences on His Metaphysics* [Недостатки гносеологии Бергсона и влияние ихъ на его метафизику], 1913). A major point of contention was what Lossky had considered an unwarranted and dangerous epistemological dualism on the side of Bergson. Lossky was convinced that Bergson had gone too far in his elevation of intuition at the expense of reason. In contrast to this, “Lossky argues that [...] reason does not distort the living flow of reality; it rather provides a window unto aspects of the otherwise undivided seamless flowing organic whole. In fact, reason is

itself a species of intuition in its own right, namely an intellectual intuition, the object of which is the atemporal facet of the world (the Platonic ideal realm), which is necessary for the existence of its temporal facet.” (Lossky – Tremblay, 2017: 17).

We can also make an interesting comparative analysis between Nikolai Losky, Nicolai Hartmann (1882-1950; Hartmann was a former student of Lossky), and Max Scheler (1874-1928). Tremblay rightly opines that “in the case of axiological issues, it appears that Lossky also borrowed from the axiologies of Hartmann and the latter’s Cologne colleague, Max Scheler.” In his analysis, Tremblay identified four overlapping emphases among the three philosophers: “(1) their ontological realism with regards to the objectivity of values, (2) their epistemological theories of the intuition of values, (3) their ontological definitions of ‘value,’ i.e., whether values are relations, qualities, essences, powers, meanings, etc., and (4) their theories of the stratification of values.” (Tremblay, 2019: 193)

Speaking of ontological realism, the contemporary Russian philosopher, Leonid Kornilaev (2019), offers an incisive analysis of the appearance of onto-epistemological thinking among Russian intellectuals in the early decades of the 20th century. His study includes Nicolai Lossky, albeit its primary focus is on the philosophical projects of two other Russian Neo-Kantians of the era, namely Lev Salagov and Nikolai Boldyrev. Their main interest overlapped with Lossky’s concern: to stem out the oppressing domination of epistemology in the European philosophy at the beginning of the 20th century. Documenting the Russian ‘turn towards ontology,’ Kornilaev uses Lossky as an exemplary figure representing Russian religious thinkers of the era. After a careful assessment of Salagov’s and Boldyrev’s philosophical approach, Kornilaev summarizes that these authors “ontologise the theory of cognition through the analysis of subjectivity, the complete elimination of psychological motives and the separation of transcendentalism from transcendentism.” He concludes that “the concepts of Russian Neo-Kantians, which imply a new orientation towards ontology, are fairly independent, and not only on account of the original interpretation of Kantian critical philosophy and Neo-Kantian epistemology but also on account of internal discussion with the Russian philosophers belonging to other movements.” (Kornilaev, 2019: 81)

Bonadyseva (2020) shares Kornilaev’s interest in exploring the Russian philosophical project of bringing gnoseology/epistemology and ontology together following the turn of the previous century. In her study on this issue, Bonadyseva offers an in-depth analysis of Lossky’s intuitivism and *sobornost*, as well as S.L. Frank’s theory of knowledge. She concludes that the new attempts to ground knowledge in direct experience and intuition emerge as a part of a larger effort to criticize “the Neo-Kantian theory of cognition and the possibility of transcendent knowledge as such.” Bonadyseva’s scrutiny leads her “to treat Lossky’s categorial framework as the representation of a system of levels of the universe each of which is characterised by two aspects: the ontological, i.e. it is part of the unity of the world, and the gnoseological, i.e. it has an independent cognitive significance.” (Bonadyseva, 2020: 95) She is critical of Lossky’s views and reveals what she considers serious contradictions in the mystical philosopher’s conceptual framework. Bonadyseva localizes the tension in Lossky’s alleged “absolutisation of intuition in cognition, the renunciation of the idea of gnoseological transcendence, incompleteness of the theory of immanence and discordance between onto-gnoseological categories.” (Bonadyseva, 2020: 95)

3 Lossky’s Personalism

Lossky’s understanding of the human person is based on what some call “Metaphysical libertarianism.” Metaphysical Libertarianism shares some core features with Vitalism (mentioned in the previous section). Essential to Metaphysical Libertarianism is the view that each human person has a certain *uncreated potential* (a

neo-Platonic category) or *uncreated energy* (a term borrowed from Aristotle). If the human mind should indeed transcend its rational and temporal limitations, the human agent must be imbued with a creative power of “superqualitative” nature. *Sobornost* may only be achieved if this creative power (energy located in the human soul) fulfills its purpose in the human agent. “Lossky acknowledges that the subject interacts with being itself and that knowledge is not a shadow or copy of being. His ontology is based on intuitivism and epistemological optimism. Its main categories are God, as the super-systematic principle, and monads.” (Abramov – Ivanov, 2020: 767)

Despite his affinity to Leibnitz’s monistic system (i.e., Monadology), Lossky clearly defended the essential freedom of the human will. (Lossky, 1902) He balanced this emphasis by conceding that there is a certain system, a predetermined conditioning of the world, represented by laws that “condition the cosmic structure.” However, “within the framework of [this cosmic structure], there is freedom for an infinite variety of activities.” (Lossky, 1952: 261) We can see the whole argument in the following passage:

“The agents’ creative power is superqualitative and does not therefore predetermine which particular values an agent will select as his final end. That selection is the agent’s free act. Consequently, the temporal order of events is not uniform even in the inorganic nature. It is quite possible that although some two electrons have millions of times repulsed each other, they will not do so the next time. But functional connections between ideal forms conditioning the existence of the world as a system--e.g., mathematical principles and the laws of the hierarchy of values and their significance for conduct, conditioning the presence of meaning in the world--are independent of the agents’ will. Violation of these laws is unthinkable, but they do not destroy the agents’ freedom: they merely create the possibility of activity as such and of its value. Those laws condition the cosmic structure within the framework of which there is freedom for an infinite variety of activities. The system of spatiotemporal and numerical forms provides room for activities that are opposed to one another in direction, value, and significance for the world.” (Lossky, 1952: 261)

Such ideas place Lossky clearly in the camp of ‘anti-determinists.’ Besides the unfreedom of determinism, the Russian thinker also fought against Cartesian dualism between the human body and mind, as if these were made of two different, contrasting, even opposing substances. Instead, the human agent manifests *sobornost*, a complete organic whole, wherein one’s existence and value judgments are reconciled in an ongoing process of experiencing the world. As *substantive agents*, humans act out their potential because of the intrinsic *dynamis*, the creative force that is within them. Order and freedom of will are reconciled in the complex, organic experience of the human agent. Lossky’s view on *dynamism* overlaps significantly with that of Vladimir S. Soloviev. This fact is best documented in the following citation from Lossky:

“The task of man as a self-conscious being is to overcome all forms of evil and imperfection, deriving from the Fall and connected with the impenetrable corporeality; man has to further the process of the reunion of all creatures with one another and with God. To do this, he must sacrifice himself for the love of God and of the whole world. But the great purpose of making the world divine cannot be accomplished by man alone, since the positive potency of being belongs to God and not to man.” (Lossky, 1952: 100)

Lossky's emphasis on a 'hypostatic' understanding of human personhood reveals his dynamic understanding of what constitutes a human person. In contrast to a static, substantive understanding, Lossky's 'hypostatic' view favors the conception of personhood as an emerging reality. He refers to Trubetskoy (1910: 250) as he writes: "The becoming hypostases, on the contrary, precisely lack this attribute of the constant and the unchanging nature of being completed in itself above time: for their eternal contents is not given them, but only offered as a task to be pursued; 'it depends on the hypostasis, on the latter's freedom to choose the way of good or evil, to fulfill its mission, to establish itself in the eternal, the divine, or to remain in the earthly and the temporal.'" (Lossky, 1952: 129-130) The quality and nature of human 'emerging' personhood, understood as a *hypostasis*, is thus directly related to aligning oneself to one's purpose of existence, namely to be oriented to and finally united with God. Human agents can achieve this not solely on their own account but by means of divine grace, which attracts them by love and compassion. Such divine action compels but never forces the soul to contemplate God's infinite beauty, wisdom, and justice. The act of contemplation does not happen on the level of the essence but merely that of divine energies (*energeias tou theou*). By emphasizing this distinction, Lossky remained theologically orthodox from the perspective of the Russian Orthodox theological tradition. On the other hand, Lossky's convictions regarding the "*substantive agent's* reincarnation – placed him beyond the orthodox Orthodoxy." (Sladek, 2017: 168)

A closer look at Lossky's 'Hypostatic Intuitivist Personalism' reveals a close ideational intertwining of supra-naturalistic concept of evolution, realism in epistemology and noetics, and a kind of hierarchical personalism. His personalism is seamlessly combined with the idea of abstract ideal principles of being, which imbues his ontology with profound ethical foundations. As Abramov and Ivanov (2020) rightly point out, Lossky "considers that values are rooted in being and that the evolution of the world is directed by God towards the good. Lossky elaborates a supra-naturalistic concept of evolution. (Sladek, 2010) He extrapolates principles of teleological determination, which are fundamental to human existence, on the underlying levels of the world as a whole" (Abramov – Ivanov, 2020: 767). Contemporary attempts at a "return to metaphysics, panpsychism, Platonism, and the desire to unite the religious worldview with new scientific discoveries," go in line with Lossky's original philosophical purpose (Abramov – Ivanov, 2020: 767)

Ethical implications of Lossky's hypostatic, intuitive personalism are clearly present in the dimension of interpersonal engagement of human agents. One of the best recent analytic studies of this examines overlapping ideas between Max Ferdinand Scheler, a German phenomenologist and ethicists with a strong interest in philosophical anthropology, and influential Russian philosophers of the beginning of the 20th century – including Lossky. The study was recently published by Tchikine (2019) and examined the concept of the alien "I" in Russian philosophy against the background of Scheler's theory of sympathy. Scheler is criticized due to his alleged emotional contamination intrinsic to his philosophy. Lossky's view is highlighted as a potential resource for solving the tension between the "I" and the "foreign Other." This is true especially of Lossky's idea that "true sympathy is possible, when the Other is already present to the I," because "there is an original gnoseological difference between 'the lived' and 'the observed.'" (Tchikine, 2019: 127) Building on the assumption of an original collectiveness of consciousness, Russian philosophers, such as Nikolai Lossky, Semyon Frank, "pointed out that the feelings of another person will only form a shell of meaningless observation, if not connected to the living knowledge through the human ability to *resonate with something transcendent*." (Tchikine, 2019: 127)

In Lossky, this "something transcendent" can only be formatively valuable to humans if love in the form of 'AGAPE' is intrinsic to it. "According to Lossky, love is the

absolute value in itself, integrating the world of values in a single axiological system, and on the other side, the main vital force unites of the social world.” (Pavenkov – Rubtcova, 2016: 227) As such, this AGAPE-love is more than an integrative axiological concept; it is a potent, organic, dynamic force that constitutes the bond of human communities. It is notable that Lossky’s “metaphysics of love describes in detail the ideal of goodness and love as the absolute positive values,” which makes it unreachable “in the lives of people in the existing social world.” (Pavenkov – Rubtcova, 2016: 227) Nevertheless, it remains true that “It is only the Absolute Perfection, God and the Kingdom of God that endows life with meaning, perfection, and beauty. Even though there is imperfection and evil in the world, religious experience revealing the existence of God raises confidence for everything created: meaningfulness is to be found beyond imperfections.” (Sladek, 2017: 166) To attain the ideal of “love as a perfect concrete coexistence of two or more persons,” according to Lossky, “is achieved only in the Kingdom of God.” (Pavenkov – Rubtcova, 2016: 233) Nevertheless, the dynamic force of AGAPE-love exerts its normative as well as formative power over human beings, extending “over the whole human being.” This dynamic, organic understanding helps us perceive love as “a coexperience of life of the other, that is, spiritual and existential co-unity of the two persons, of their individual existences.” (Pavenkov – Rubtcova, 2016: 232)

4. Conclusion

Lossky was one of the few philosophers of the 20th century who was able to give his thinking the form of a comprehensive system, covering almost all disciplines of theoretical and practical philosophy and touching upon the deepest aspirations of the human soul. His mystical, intuitive, and experiential epistemology produced an inspiring approach to life in general and to understanding the human being in particular. Firstly, Lossky’s emphasis on the organic interconnectedness between the development of the human agent’s personality with the ethical and even spiritual evolution intrinsic to the world of nature provides an inspiring impetus for the contemporary integration of social, ethical, and ecological concerns. Secondly, Lossky’s sober recognition that there is and always will be (within this temporal realm) evil in the human heart – that there will be a raging conflict between the realm/kingdom of the Devil and the realm/Kingdom of God – serves us a sobering reminder that even the best aspirations of human individuals and human institutions (including all forms of human governments) are tainted with imperfection and evil. Hence the need for patience, empathy, compassion, lovingkindness in our human societies. If love in the form of AGAPE is the solution to human imperfections and social tensions, this solution will only begin to be reachable and employable if human individuals and societies stay open to transcendence. Lossky’s search for an absolute grounding of ethics in Christianity with implications for “human freedom, motives and goals of moral behavior” (Plasienkova - Slobodian, 2019: 7) is arguably questionable in the current philosophical discourse permeated with secular and even anti-religious sentiments. Still, this debatable emphasis cannot be ignored and should be dealt with objectively. A recourse to religious/transcendent sources of human flourishing becomes more understandable as we fight a worldwide pandemic. As Sladek rightly suggests, “at the time of illness, a sick person should focus on his spiritual growth, he should deepen his prayers and concentrate on the contemplative dimension of the relationship to God, he should develop compassion and love toward others, he should forget his own sorrows in helping others. Disease and healing should thus have its social and transcendent dimension.” (Sladek, 2017: 169-170) On the other hand, it would be difficult to defend the view that Lossky was primarily a religious thinker, let alone a Christian theologian. The fact remains that Lossky

moved on to philosophy from the issues of the natural sciences. He contemplated matters of epistemology and noetics philosophically and then turned to metaphysics. Still, his openness to transcendence and vital engagements with Russian Orthodox theologians served more than a vague inspiration to his own reflections. They inspired, guided, and formed his thinking, including his anthropological reflections.

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